

## Kucinich heads anti-war coalition in U.S. Congress

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By Thomas Ferraro

Reuters

WASHINGTON, Oct 6 (Reuters) - "Let's stop wasting American lives," reads an old anti-war flier kept as a memento in the office of Democratic Rep. Dennis Kucinich of Ohio.

Thirty years after handing out copies of this leaflet during his first run for Congress as a young foe of the Vietnam War, Kucinich is rallying opposition to a possible U.S. attack on Iraq.

Kucinich lost that 1972 congressional campaign, and he will likely lose his bid to stop Congress from authorizing President George W. Bush to use force against Iraq.

But dim prospects do not deter this long-time dove and liberal gadfly as he heads an anti-war coalition of some two dozen fellow Democrats in the U.S. House of Representatives, none of them members of the chamber's top leadership.

"War is a failure of diplomacy and imagination and creativity," Kucinich, 55, said in an interview with Reuters last week.

"I'm trying to organize an effort that is based on resolving this crisis peacefully by insisting on U.N. weapons inspections of Iraq while also making efforts to bring Iraq back into the community of nations," he said.

"How is it that we can solve this peacefully?" Kucinich asked rhetorically, barely pausing before providing an answer.

"First, stop the war talk. It is destabilizing in the region and with our allies," Kucinich said.

Kucinich sounds like a veteran of the anti-war movement that helped radicalize his generation.

But he can now buttress his case with inside information he gets as a lawmaker.

"Our intelligence agencies have not produced any evidence that suggests that (Iraqi President) Saddam Hussein has usable weapons of mass destruction, the ability to deliver those weapons, or the intentions to do so," Kucinich said.

Kucinich first gained national attention in 1977 when, at the age of 31, he was elected mayor of Cleveland. Two years later, after the city slipped into default, Kucinich was defeated for re-election and sent into political exile.

He worked as a radio talk show host, college teacher, consultant and TV reporter before making a political comeback in 1994 when elected to the Ohio Senate. In 1996, he won a seat in the U.S. House of Representatives.

### HEADS PROGRESSIVE CAUCUS

For the past two years, he has headed the 56-member House Progressive Caucus, where he has waged fights on health care, education and the environment.

"Some people see Dennis Kucinich as an articulate and staunchly liberal voice who is extremely good at making his point and getting attention," said a senior House Democratic leadership aide. "Others see him as a pain who constantly tries to push Democrats further to the left."

Rep. Jan Schakowsky of Illinois is a House deputy Democratic whip, a member of Kucinich's

anti-war coalition and an admirer of the three-term lawmaker.

"What I really appreciate is that Dennis has moved this agenda forward, he provides us with needed information, and has been constantly optimistic," said Schakowsky.

Kucinich said his constituents -- "they include a lot of veterans, working people, very patriotic people" -- know where he stands and that his telephone calls from them have run 10-to-1 against a war with Iraq.

Though national polls show the public somewhat split, Kucinich predicted that once people began asking more questions, opposition would mount.

He fears that like Vietnam, a U.S. invasion of Iraq could mushroom into a lengthy and divisive war with high casualties.